

Message Text

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ACTION DHA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 VO-03 SCA-01 CIAE-00
INSE-00 DODE-00 SY-05 DEAE-00 AID-05 SP-02 SS-15
NSC-05 EUR-12 PA-01 PRS-01 /079 W
-----069052 261323Z /43

R 261032Z AUG 77
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5552
INFO USMISSION GENEVA
AMCONSUL UDORN
AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L 19014

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, TH
SUBJECT: LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND

1. FOLLOWING IS A COMPOSIT OF THAI AND UNHCR VIEWS ON THE
POSSIBILITIES OF LOCAL SETTLEMENT IN THAILAND OF INDOCHINESE
REFUGEES. THESE THOUGHTS PROCEEDED FROM CONVERSATIONS DURING THE
LAST THREE DAYS WHILE INTRODUCING BARNES TO DAMRONG SUNTH-
ONSARATHUN, DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY OF INTERIOR; COL. KAMON
PRACHUAPMO, DIRCTOR OF THE DISPLACED PERONS CENTER AT THE INTERIOR:
AND CESAR BERTA, LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNHCR, AND HIS STAFF.

2. THAI VIEWPOINTS: THE REFUGEE INFOW, PRINCIPALLY FROM LAOS,
MUST COME TO A HALT; THUS THE RECENT AGREEMENT TO LABEL
MOST FUTURE INCOMING REFUGEES AS ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS UNLESS THEY
CAN PROVE DIRE POLITICAL DISTRESS IN THEIR HOMELAND. WHILE
THE LAO ARE RELATIGELY ASSIMILABLE, THERE IS PROGRESSIVELY LESS
POSSIBILITY OF ABSORBING CAMBODIANS, AND ABOVE ALL VIETNAMESE INTO TH
AI
SOCIETY. AS COUNTRIES OF TRADITONAL IMMIGRATION INCREASINGLY FOLLOW
THE AMERICAN, FRENCH AND AUSTRALIAN EXAMPLE OF TAKING IN
REFUGEES, THE THAI RELUCTANTLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THEY WILL
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HAVE TO DO THEIR PART BY LOCALLY SETTLING A GROUP OF THEM PERHAPS
30,000. FOR THE TIME BEING HOWEVER THAILAND'S PRIORITY IS
TO STOP THE INFLOW AND AWAIT FURTHER DEPARTURES. LOCAL
SETTLEMENT IS NOT A CURRENT PROSPECT.

3. BERTA AND HIS STAFF LAMENTED OUR NOT HAVING USED THE PAROLE
AS A QUID PRO QUO FOR A THAI COMMITMENT TO LOCALLY SETTLE

REFUGEES. ASKED ABOUT THEIR VIEWS ON APPEALS TO COUNTRIES OF TRADITIONAL IMMIGRATION TO ESTABLISH FIXED QUOTAS FOR INDOCHINESE REFUGEES, BERTA AND HIS STAFF WERE NEGATIVE. THE UNHCR HIMSELF WOULD NOT THINK MUCH OF THE IDEA EITHER.

4. THEY ALSO SAID THAT DEVELOPED COUNTRIES ARE LIKELY TO BE PROGRESSIVELY LESS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT MAKING MONETARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PERPETUAL UPKEEP OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND. MONEY FOR THAT PURPOSE JUST GOES DOWN THE DRAIN. THE TIME HAS TO COME FOR SOME SORT OF LOCAL SETTLEMENT THE COST OF WHICH WOULD BE MODEST, NOT TO EXCEED \$110 PERCAPITA IN DIRECT COSTS. THE THAI MIGHT EVENTUALLY BE WILLING TO LOCALLY SETTLE AS MANY AS 50,000 REFUGEES, BUT THERE WAS NO SIGN THEY WERE WILLING TO BEGIN NOW. IN FACT, THE RECENT COMMITMENTS BY THE US AND OTHER COUNTRIES TO ACCEPT FURTHER REFUGEES MAY HAVE ENCOURAGED THE THAI TO PERSIST IN THEIR SO FAR CLOSED ATTITUDE TOWARD LOCAL SETTLEMENT.

5. RATHER THAN APPROACH COUNTRIES TO TAKE IN FIXED QUOTAS OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES, BERTA CONTENDS THAT SPECIAL APPEALS ARE MORE FEASIBLE. HE CITED HIS SUCCESS IN GETTING GREAT BRITAIN TO TAKE IN 25 ILLITERATE CAMBODIAN FISHERMEN. HE PARTICULARLY RECOMMENDS MAKING SPECIAL APPEALS FOR WHAT HE CLAIMS WILL EVENTUALLY BE SOME 1600 VIETNAMESE AT THE SI KHIU

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CAMP IN KORAT.

6. BERTA BROUGHT UP WHAT IS NOW HIS WELL KNOWN STANCE ON THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL REFUGEES, CONTENDING THAT THE FORMER WERE LESS DESERVING. WE COUNTERED THAT WE SAW LITTLE USEFULNESS OR VALIDITY IN DISTINGUISHING ECONOMIC FROM POLITICAL REFUGEES. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SENDING REFUGEES BACK HOME WAS NOT PRUDENT AND CAMBODIAN WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION.

7. WE MENTIONED TO BOTH THE THAI AND BERTA THAT RECOGNIZING THAT VIETNAMESE HAVE SCANT PROSPECT OF ACCEPTANCE INTO THAI SOCIETY, WE WOULD MAKE A SPECIAL EFFORT TO TAKE REFUGEES FROM THE SI KHIU CAMP. WE WOULD ALSO ENCOURAGE OUR AUSTRALIAN AND FRENCH CONTACTS IN BANGKOK TO DO LIKEWISE. WE ALSO SAID THAT WE WILL BE DOING A MORE THOROUGH SCREENING OF THE HMONG IN NORTH THAILAND THAN DURING THE EXPANDED PAROLE PROGRAM AND WOULD THEREFORE ATTEMPT TO HELP OUT THE THAI IN LESSENING THAT BURDEN.

8. ACTION REQUESTED: IF YOU SHARE OUR SUPPORT FOR BERTA'S SUGGESTION FOR A SPECIAL APPEAL, PARTICULARLY TO TAKE THE

VIETNAMESE REFUGEES OUR OF SI KHIU, AND SOME HMONG FROM OTHER
CAMPS, YOU MAY WISH TO FOLLOW UP THROUGH THE US MISSION
IN GENEVA WITHOUT ATTRIBUTION TO BERTA AS THE GENESIS OF
THE IDEA. THROUGH PROGRESS IN REDUCING THAI CONCERNS ABOUT THE
SI KHIU CAMP, THEY MIGHT BECOME MORE CONDUCIVE TO DISCUSSION
OF GENERAL LOCAL SETTLEMENT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 26-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BANGKO19014
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770309-0489
Format: TEL
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770821/aaaaaquc.tel
Line Count: 123
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: e780e852-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION DHA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1478551
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND
TAGS: SREF, TH
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/e780e852-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009